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SUBJECT: Climate Change Network Fills Void in South China

REF: A) 09 GUANGZHOU 17; B) 09 GUANGZHOU 678

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1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: Wasting no time -- government, business, and NGO leaders gathered in Guangzhou to celebrate the launch of the South China Climate Change Network (SCCCN) on the first workday following the conclusion of the COP-15 Climate Change Conference. Inspired by a British Consulate initiative, SCCCN will be run out of the Guangdong Institute for Energy Conversion (GIEC), a research institute closely affiliated with the provincial government. With the primary objectives of increasing climate change awareness and promoting low-carbon development in south China, the network aims to fulfill several functions, from operating as an online "information bridge" for publicizing research and exchanging best practices to serving as a policy think tank capable of lobbying local government. Although it is not yet clear how much support the network will receive from government officials, the SCCCN has the potential to fill a "coordination void" among NGOs and academics in south China and offers post an important tool for scaling up outreach on climate change and clean energy. End Summary and Comment.

RAISING AWARENESS AND PROMOTING LOW-CARBON GROWTH

2. (U) Aware of the challenges Guangdong's manufacturing and export-based economy poses in terms of rising pollution and growing carbon emissions, the SCCCN was launched December 21 with the primary objectives of increasing climate change awareness and promoting the transition to a low-carbon economic development model in south China. Defining itself as an "informal, not-for-profit network for individuals and organizations with an interest in climate change and clean energy," the SCCCN places no restrictions on its membership, which is offered at no cost. The network's target audience consists of renewable energy and energy efficiency companies, academic researchers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media, policy think tanks and government officials.

3. (SBU) One mechanism SCCCN intends to use to connect key stakeholders is to create an online "information bridge," which can be used by academics to publicize research findings and by NGOs and businesses to exchange best practices. The SCCCN also plans to

distribute via its website a monthly newsletter on climate change and low-carbon issues. At the network's launch ceremony, representatives of SCCCN's host organization, GIEC, also discussed the network's intention to serve as a policy think tank with the ability to influence local policymakers on behalf of its members. (Comment: The close affiliation of SCCCN's implementing organization with the provincial government -- GIEC is the provincial government's energy strategy research center -- may help facilitate the network's efforts to shape policy decisions related to climate change and clean energy. End Comment.)

NORWEGIAN, AUSTRALIAN CONSULATES ALSO ON BOARD

14. (SBU) The SCCCN grew out of a forum organized by the British Consulate in April 2009 to gauge public interest in creation of a climate change network. Based on a favorable response to the concept, the British supported GIEC in the organization of SCCCN. Representatives from the Norwegian and Australian Consulates have also expressed keen interest in the network and were present at the launch ceremony. During opening remarks, a representative from the Norwegian Consulate highlighted the timeliness and relevance of the network's launch, adding that the SCCCN would play a key role in raising public awareness and providing a platform for accelerating positive trends in low-carbon development in south China. Likewise, while noting the high priority her government places on supporting China's efforts to combat climate change, an Australian consular official applauded the launch of the SCCCN as an opportunity to exchange best practices on carbon capture and storage (CCS), carbon management, and other low-carbon technologies.

NETWORK FILLS NGO "COORDINATION VOID"

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15. (SBU) The uncertain legal status of many NGOs in south China and government suspicion of these organizations discourages coordination of NGO activities (ref A and B), especially those designed to influence policymakers. In this context, the SCCCN has the potential to fill a "coordination void" by facilitating the exchange of best practices between NGOs and by providing a forum for NGO representatives to interact with each other and with government officials, academics, and business representatives. Although it is not yet clear how much active support the SCCCN will receive from local government, remarks made at the launch ceremony by Wu Hong, a mid-level official from the Guangzhou Development and Reform Commission (DRC), who referred to SCCCN as a "timely and relevant" initiative, seem to indicate a degree of government openness to engagement with the network.

OPPORTUNITY TO EXPAND OUTREACH

16. (SBU) Comment: At a recent follow-up meeting with SCCCN organizers, GIEC Energy Strategy Research Center Director Zhao Daiqing told ESTHoff that she hoped engagement through the SCCCN would lay the foundation for a long-term cooperation mechanism between GIEC and U.S. partners, including the Consulate, U.S.-based research institutions and other USG agencies. During a side conversation after the meeting, a top SCCCN organizer invited ESTHoff to sit on the steering committee of the network and provide input on meeting and conference planning. While the Consulate plans to limit its participation in the network primarily to an observer role, the option of publicizing Consulate events on the SCCCN website and the opportunity SCCCN provides for engagement on a regular basis with NGOs, academics, business, government and other consulates should facilitate Post's efforts to strengthen cooperation and boost outreach related to climate change and clean energy in south China. End Comment.

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